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ABSTRACT

This journal issue is devoted to the theme topic "Rural Education." The first article, "Science is Everywhere," by Chris Taylor, presents a project which uses local experts as an integral part of the school's science curriculum. "Better Teachers, Better Readers" by Scott Steen describes a system of strategic reading used in rural Wisconsin school districts. Summaries of emerging research and development outcomes cover the topics of school cooperatives, distance learning, teacher recruitment and retention, at-risk students, school leadership, staff development, school and business partnerships, community relations, audiographics, and thinking skills. "Are Our Rural Students Getting a 'Fair Shake?'" by Ullik Rouk summarizes a report to Congress on the condition of education in rural, small schools. The final article, "You Bet Partnerships Make a Lot of Sense for Rural Schools!" by Paul Nachtigal, discusses school-community partnerships involving public and private sector institutions, organizations, and other schools and higher education institutions. The journal contains a diagram showing the service areas for the 10 regional educational laboratories that make new educational products and publications available. Also provided are the names, locations, and directors of the regional laboratories. (KS)

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R&D Preview

A PREVIEW OF THE BEST EMERGING EDUCATIONAL R&D OUTCOMES

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RURAL EDUCATION

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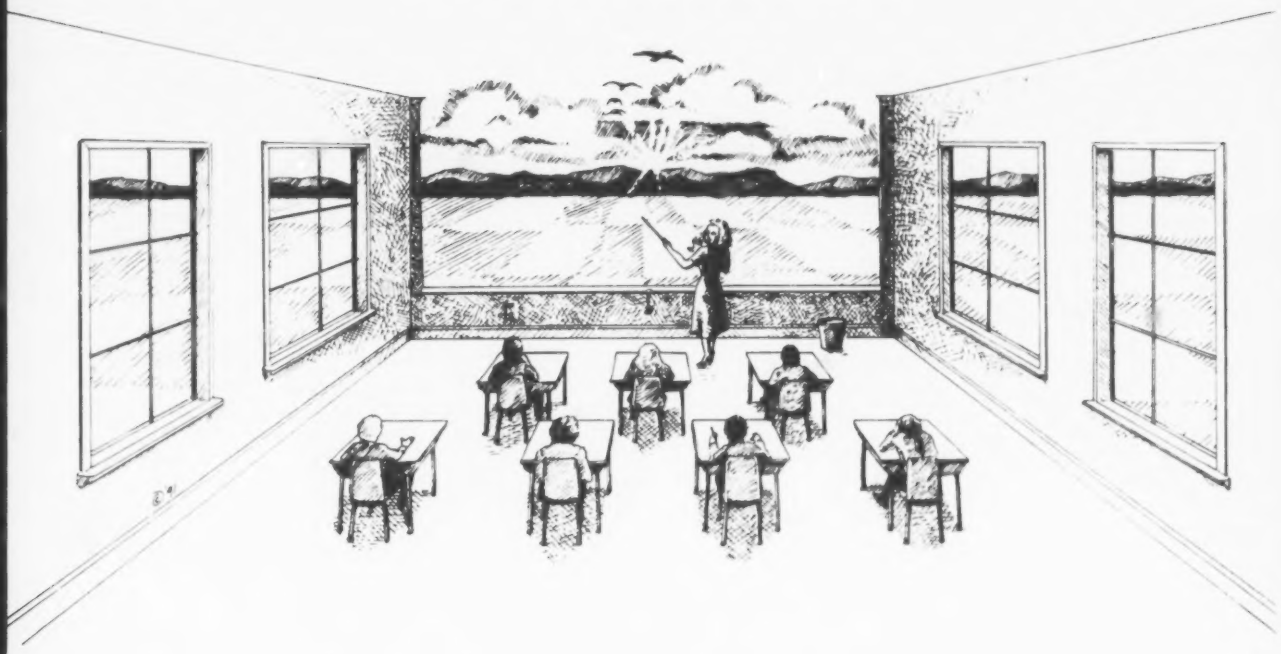
IN RURAL LANDSCAPES



SCIENCE IS EVERYWHERE!

BY CHRIS TAYLOR

A copper miner, wearing faded jeans and a weathered face, swaggers into a remote elementary classroom, sets down a knapsack full of fossils and native minerals, and begins talking to wide-eyed third graders. But this visitor is no colorful local raconteur about to regale kids with tall tales about buried treasure. He's a degreed engineer and geologist, and more important, an integral part of the school's science curriculum, a "partner" in an exciting approach to teaching science in rural, small schools.

Community members have been involved in schools for many years, bringing enrichment into classrooms through presentations on everything from batiking to city management. But most often, these guest lecturers were just that — *outsiders* who *talked* to the students with little or no relevance to the ongoing curriculum.

But that's changing, thanks to an innovative project going on at Southwest Educational Development Laboratory (SEDL) in Austin, Texas. Born in the rural classrooms of New Mexico, *Strengthening Science Partnerships* links small, resource-bound rural schools with nearby science-rich corporations, museums, zoos, aquaria, and state and federal government agencies such as the U.S. Forest Service.

The project grew directly out of a 1989-90 collaboration in which SEDL helped a New Mexico Museum and its university partners gain exposure for their own school outreach program. In 1988, SEDL identified as a "promising practice" the *New Mexico Rural Science Education Program* (NMRSEP), a joint project of the New Mexico Museum of Natural History and the New Mexico Center for Rural Education at New Mexico State University. NMRSEP assumed that rural schools, so often described as disadvantaged in terms of teaching resources, actually have access to natural resources that most urban schools can only envy. In addition, students and teachers come to school with a great deal of informal knowledge about the area where they live.

Turning that informal knowledge into sound science instruction, however, takes some assistance. And that's what NMRSEP provided. Natural History Museum staff helped rural schools survey their local landscape — plants, animals, woods, ponds, mountains, fault lines and fossils, as well as identified organizations and individuals that could assist them in teaching science. University personnel developed manuals based on the resources pinpointed in the local survey and trained teachers to rely on the landscape, not the textbook, in their

science teaching.

Pita McDonald, a third grade teacher in remote Cuba, New Mexico, recalls that NMRSEP was responsible for "infecting" both teachers and students with science. The project's "hands-on" approaches not only convey science content, they strengthen thinking skills and, best of all, "hook" students' interest.

The need to "hook" students is obvious. All-too-familiar statistics rank American students at or near the bottom of the industrialized world in math and science achievement. The problem begins in the early grades. Science instruction is not emphasized in most elementary school curricula, partly because teachers feel uncomfortable with the subject. "Science is a bugaboo for all elementary teachers," says SEDL staff member Stephen Marble. "Kids, on the other hand, see everything as science. It's odd that teachers are terrified of something that their students are so comfortable with."

A 1990 cover article in *Newsweek* described the problem a bit differently: "Unfortunately, few American students ever get to taste real science, for few of the nation's schools teach it . . . American science education serves not to nurture children's natural curiosity, but to extinguish it with catalogs of dreary facts and terms."

Replacing "dreary facts and terms" with local-based, hands-on science teaching was the purpose of *Strengthening Science in Rural, Small Schools* (SSRSS), a two-year project based on the NMRSEP model that SEDL began in 1989. The laboratory sponsored hands-on workshops that that included site-visits to NMRSEP schools; published two comprehensive "how to" documents, one for museum staff, one for rural educators; and conducted a conference for museum educators and rural school staff featuring common sessions and special interest breakouts.

The results were so promising that since then, SEDL has initiated the *Strengthening Science Partnerships* project. Initially, SEDL will work closely with three to five agencies, probably starting with museums, although according to project coordinator Wesley Hoover, the eventual intent is to work with some corporations, too. An additional service component will allow SEDL to provide workshops and materials for 10 to 15 other agencies.

Strengthening Science Partnerships is targeted to those museums, businesses and other agencies — potential partners seeking outreach programs. "Our task," according to Hoover, "is to find where they are and the schools where they're needed." Project staff member Martha Boethel says the project hopes to "hit people early as they establish outreach programs. There are things we can do to help them maximize their efforts from the beginning."

Currently, most museum and corporate education outreach programs act more like substitute teachers than integral parts of the curriculum. "Often the program is a 'one-shot deal,' out of sequence in the curriculum," said Boethel. In the partnership model, on the other hand, the agency staff becomes an ongoing resource for the school.

Working with NMSEP and SSRSS, Boethel observes, has taught SEDL a great deal about facilitating partnerships between schools and other organizations. "People from outside the school setting don't know much about working with schools. Museum educators and others have a lot of science information, but don't know how to 'teach' it. They assume that teachers can take a lot of technical information and translate it into good teaching, but it takes more than that."

"SEDL can tell them a lot about how to work with schools," she explains, "what kind of major disruption they can cause when they cancel an in-service session at the last minute, for instance, or exactly what constitutes effective teaching. We see a place for the lab to provide needed translation of rich resource materials into good science instruction."

From work with NMRSEP and SSRSS, SEDL has identified several factors that are critical to the success of a partnership program. First, such a program must be teacher-centered. "When you establish partnerships," Hoover says, "It's important to have key teachers in sync with the program. Agencies need to realize you won't have the same success with everyone, but one teacher can carry the weight of getting others involved."

Second, the program must take advantage of local natural resources, including partnership organizations. "There's a natural excitement inherent in museums, state parks, aquaria," says Marble. "They're active and alive. Students pick up on the excitement quickly."

The third "must" is commitment from both sides of the partnership, says Hoover. "We know that on the partner end of the equation you need an institution that is committed from the standpoint of both mission and funds, plus a staff member who is enthusiastic about going out to schools. The partner needs to understand that the payoff is long-term. The best educational outreach program is not going to produce long lines at the museum door tomorrow."

"On the school end," he continues, "you need teachers who are committed to a strong science program and willing to have outside persons come in and talk to them about teaching."

"What's so exciting about this project," according to Hoover, "is that there's clearly a need to improve science instruction, but there are a lot of folks out there who can help. Our task is to facilitate those partnerships — to put together the ones who have the expertise with the ones who need the expertise."

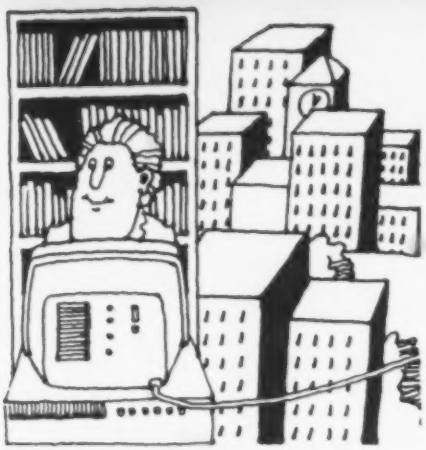
* * *

SEDL has produced two guides for rural educators interested in establishing partnerships for science education. "Using Partnerships to Strengthen Elementary Science Education: A Guide for Rural Administrators" costs $12. "Strengthening Science Outreach Programs for Rural Elementary Schools: A Manual for Museum Staff" costs $21. Both are available from the Southwest Educational Development Laboratory, 211 East Seventh St., Austin, TX 78701-3281.

Better Teachers, Better Readers

Miles Don't Matter in this Professional Development Program for Rural Reading Teachers.

BY SCOTT STEEN



Picture the following scenario. Your child is sick, home remedies aren't working, and so you take Little Billy to your local pediatrician. He pokes and prods, and finally says, "Hmm, I've read about this."

"What do you mean you've *read* about it?" you ask nervously. "Haven't you ever actually treated this before?"

The doctor pauses before answering. "Well, no, living this far out in the country, I don't get all the experience I'd like. This condition requires expert attention."

"Is there someone who can help? Somewhere else I can take him?"

"Oh yes. In fact, I'll call a specialist I know at County General. You might not even have to drive all that way. We can do a lot of testing here, they can analyze it, and we will confer on the best treatment."

Parents, no matter where they live, want their child's doctor to be up on the latest and most effective medical practices. And the same goes for their child's teacher. After all, teachers are responsible for intellectual health.

But rural teachers are often in the same bind as this doctor. Many of them live in areas so sparse in population or financially strapped that access to top-notch professional development is difficult. Professional development programs at neighboring school districts, intermediate service agencies, universities, or colleges may mean several hours of driving.

Recognizing the challenges that access, time, and cost pose for rural schools, in 1987 the U.S. Congress funded what became known as the "Rural Education Initiative." The legislation directed the regional educational laboratories "to identify and support the development of promising practices that enhance the quality of education in small, rural schools."

Congressman David R. Obey of Wisconsin, sponsor of the initiative, is a staunch believer in rural schools. "Rural schools should not be passed over in the school reform movement," he says. "They deserve the same access to innovative programs that other schools have. In a time of tight budgets, it's programs like this that can give us the best return on our dollar because they use the latest research findings on how kids learn."

The Rural Wisconsin Reading Project (RWRP) was one of the initiative's centerpieces. RWRP grew out of a major effort by the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction to install a system of "strategic reading" in Wisconsin schools. But what made RWRP especially unique was that it communicated this groundbreaking instructional method in reading to rural teachers with teachers rarely having to leave their home schools.

"Teachers make education work," says Larry Friedman of North Central Regional Educational Laboratory (NCREL), who coordinated the project. "The best thing we can do for students is to help their teachers become better."

Strategic reading is a higher-order thinking skill that has to do with the way the reader approaches the reading material. Most curricula treat reading as a one-step process. The reader is simply supposed to absorb the meaning inherent in the book. The strategy is the same whether the student is reading a "Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles" comic book, *War and Peace*, or *The Joy of Cooking*.

However, that is not the way people read, nor should it be the way people are taught to read. According to research, reading is a goal-directed strategic process. Goal-directed means readers read for a specific purpose. The strategic process kicks in as the reader decides what reading strategy to use to satisfy the purpose. For example, a reader would not approach a mathematics textbook with the same goals as he or she would pick up a manual on automobile repair. Equally important, readers approach reading with a store of previously learned information that can help them get more out of their reading.

The RWRP approach teaches students to develop a plan for their reading, use knowledge they already have, and decide beforehand what strategies will be most effective in achieving their purpose in reading the text. It also teaches students to reflect on how well their plan is working and to modify it if necessary. Reading strategies might include making predictions about what the text will say (using clues like titles and sub-headings), examining the text structure, and determining the meanings of key words or concepts.

Three organizations — the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, the Wisconsin Educational Communications Board (a group that includes public radio and television stations and other communications and educational organizations), and NCREL in Oak Brook, Illinois — formed a partnership to run the project. The Department of Public Instruction and the Communications Board provided the technology that linked the staff development to project schools through networked computers, television, radio, video-conferencing, and telephone conference calls. NCREL brought into this high-tech mix its expertise in reading instruction, staff development, rural education, leadership, and school change.

Although telecourses over satellite, microwave, and fiber optic television had been used to teach students in far-apart classrooms throughout the 1980s, the idea of using the technol-

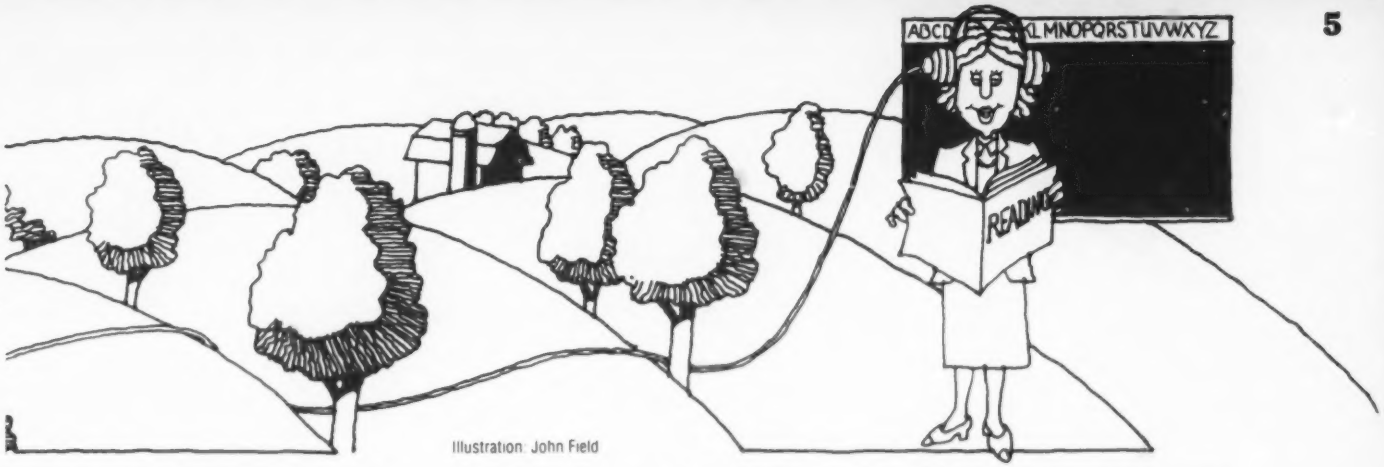


Illustration: John Field

ogy for staff development came late in the decade. The technologies allowed a learning community to develop among educators who teach in schools hundreds of miles apart. For many teachers who work in tiny rural schools, RWRP gave them, for the first time, the opportunity to have had regular contact with other teachers teaching at the same grade level.

Staff development in RWRP is a long-term process. But despite its high-tech sheen, Friedman calls the program "technology supported, not technology based. . . . Too often, staff development is a series of disconnected events. Unfortunately, events don't work very well because their purposes and context often aren't relevant to what teachers do in the classroom."

Research indicates that professional development is most successful when it allows participants to interact with the material over time and in the actual situations where the new practices will be used. Collegiality among teachers, even across great distances, has been a crucial factor in the project's success. "We just stuck together, worked together, and complained together," said Mary Ann Jensen, a reading specialist in 629-student Alma Center school district.

School leadership teams, made up of principals, reading specialists, library-media specialists, and teachers — the exact combination may differ depending on staff composition in a school — guide staff development and provide instructional leadership. In addition, clusters of schools share the resources — and costs — of a staff development expert.

One of the most popular staff development materials in the program is a video, computer, and print series called "Storylords." In this fantasy, a daydreaming student named Norbert becomes an "apprentice storylord" who must save the inhabitants of the planet, Mojuste, from being turned into stone statues by the wicked storylord, Thorzuul. The only way to escape Thorzuul's sculpture gallery is to solve a problem. Using the principle that you really haven't mastered a skill until you can teach it to someone else, Norbert learns a reading skill from his teacher, which he then passes on to help the good citizens of Mojuste beat Thorzuul.

The teacher in the video models how strategic reading is used in the classroom. In this way, staff development mirrors the reading program itself. Just as students learn to read strategically, teachers learn about strategic reading and apply it in the classroom. One of the benefits of this parallel is that teachers actually make the strategic technique their own and are, therefore, better able to model it to their students.

Teachers who have completed the program are pleased with their new teaching know-how. Everyone wins, they report. Teachers enjoy teaching and feel more in control of instruction. The skill allows their advanced students to stretch their capabilities, and slow learners to learn more quickly. Rigorous evaluation shows that students in RWRP score the same or higher than two-thirds of non-RWRP students on the strategy subscale of the Wisconsin Third Grade Reading Test, an "educationally meaningful" difference according to program evaluators.

Teachers also talk about how reading is no longer confined to reading period. Students have taken key strategic reading concepts like prior knowledge, inference, and text structure and incorporated them into the way they read and think in every subject.

Jim Sonnenberg, who teaches second grade in rural New Auburn, sums it up the best: "My whole concept of teaching has changed since I started. I always thought I had to get the kids ready for third grade, but I really have to get them ready for a lifetime of learning."

* * *

Catherine N. Cleary also contributed to this article.

The Rural Wisconsin Reading Project was a three-year development effort that involved 17 rural school districts. Since then, RWRP has been submitted to the U.S. Department of Education's Program Effectiveness Panel, which has confirmed that the project did, indeed, improve reading instruction through telecommunications-supported staff development and that students did become more strategic readers as a result. The project, renamed the Rural Schools Reading Project, is on the National Diffusion Network list of effective educational programs.

The laboratory has completed a set of materials so that rural schools across the country can follow along the trail blazed by the 17 Wisconsin districts. NCREL will be using and refining these materials with a network of rural and urban schools across the North Central region.

For more information about the Rural Schools Reading Project, write to the North Central Regional Educational Laboratory, 1900 Spring Road, Suite 300, Oak Brook, IL 60521-1480.

Rural School Cooperatives Don't Just Share Resources; They Spread Ideas, Information

Increasing costs and declining rural populations are forcing small districts to restructure. Some districts respond by consolidating their schools. A better form, says Andy Somer of the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, is cooperation between school districts.

Consolidation, Somer explains, involves the legal but involuntary joining of districts, a move that may trade local identity and control for financial stability and expanded educational resources.

School districts in cooperatives share educational resources, too. But they collaborate voluntarily and have an agreement for resolving conflicts. Somer classifies three types of rural cooperatives: formal cooperatives that have independent authority and facilities; cooperatives with a governing board made up of various district representatives; and cooperatives that merely work out logistical arrangements between the districts.

Somer notes that the primary reason for establishing a school cooperative is usually survival for the small districts.

But cooperatives can present an added bonus for students by reinvigorating teaching staffs and providing a network for exchanging information among teachers and administrators in participating districts.

Among the elements critical to success in a cooperative effort are: a common sense of purpose; establishing an appropriate structure, lines of communication and leadership roles; and setting a finite test period at the end of which participants can decide if they want to continue the relationship.

The lessons of successful cooperatives can be useful not just for other small school districts, Somer says, but can even "serve as a model for larger districts reorganizing into more manageable units."

Source

Rural School District Cooperatives is available from Document Reproduction Services, Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, 101 S.W. Main St., Suite 500, Portland, OR 97204 (cite order no. NL-2-590-RD, 42 pages, $7.80 prepaid).

Students, School Faculty Give Distance Learning High Grades In North Dakota Survey

A survey of distance learning in North Dakota reveals that students are pleased with such courses and would take another one if given the opportunity. Ninety percent of the students said their distance learning classes were just as difficult or more difficult than traditional classes.

The survey was conducted in 27 North Dakota public schools by the Mid-continent Regional Educational Laboratory. Each school surveyed uses one of three major types of distance learning — Instruction by Satellite, Audiographic Tele-learning, and Interactive Television.

Students also indicated that a willingness to take responsibility for learning was most helpful in distance learning classes. Classroom coordinators agreed, saying that the most common reasons for the dropouts were the difficulty of the courses and a lack of student motivation to work as hard as the courses required.

Study director Vicki Hobbs reminds readers that in distance learning classes, like in other classes, all students do not achieve equally well. She notes, "student learning styles do have an effect on students' success in distance learning."

Like students, the majority of administrators, teachers, and communities were satisfied with the programs. Ninety-one percent of the administrators plan to expand distance learning in their schools over the next five years. Seventy-eight percent said that most likely they would be using more than one type of distance learning by that time.

The greatest impediment to the expansion of distance learning programs, said 94 percent of the administrators, was cost. However, 75 percent also said that state policies and regulation impede expansion.

Source

Distance Learning in North Dakota: A Cross Technology Study of the Schools, Administrators, Coordinators, Instructors, and Students is available from Mid-continent Regional Educational Laboratory, 4709 Belleview Ave., Kansas City, MO 64112 (cite order no. ML-1290-RD, 70 pages, $9 prepaid).

Rural Administrators Adopting More Aggressive Strategies To Attract Qualified Teachers

Administrators in many of the nation's rural school districts are trying to stave off a major teacher shortage with aggressive teacher recruitment and retention strategies, but they face a tough task. Nationally, the teacher turnover rate is six percent; in rural areas it is from 30 to 50 percent.

"Since rural school districts generally cannot afford salaries equal to those paid in large urban districts, they are encouraged to sweeten their offers with other incentives," says Deanne Stone in a brief written for the Far West Laboratory for Educational Research and Development. Districts may try to attract teachers by paying their interview and moving expenses, reimbursing teachers for tuition and professional conferences, and subsidizing housing.

But Stone also warns administrators against giving prospective teachers misleading or exaggerated information about the school or community. Erroneous information will not keep teachers in the district very long and serves only to exacerbate an already expensive, time-consuming recruitment process.

"Administrators' best bets are recruiting teachers from colleges which draw from rural areas, or offering promising students and local people interested in teaching careers college scholarships in exchange for a commitment to teach in the district for an agreed upon number of years," she says.

"The ideal rural teacher," she continues, "would be a generalist who is flexible, energetic, resourceful, self-reliant, and committed to staying in the school district for at least five years." Such teachers, however, are likely to remain scarce unless universities begin to design courses that specifically address the frustrations that rural teachers face.

Source

Recruiting and Retaining Teachers in Rural Schools is available from Far West Laboratory for Educational Research and Development, 730 Harrison St., San Francisco, CA 94107 (cite order no. FW-690-RD, 6 pages, $4 prepaid).

Annotated Bibliography Gives Schools Info and Resources On Educating Students At Risk

An annotated bibliography of 136 articles puts schools in touch with information on the characteristics of students at risk and effective strategies for working with them.

The bibliography is accompanied by two complete monographs, one by Aaron Pallas of Columbia University and the other by Jack L. Frymier and Neville L. Robertson of Phi Delta Kappa Foundation.

Defining at-risk youth as "young people [who] have been exposed to inadequate or inappropriate educational experiences in the family, school, or community," Pallas finds 40 percent of students at-risk. He describes methods that further hurt these students and elements that make schools responsive to them.

Schools need to realize, says Pallas, that at-risk students have unique backgrounds and experiences, and consequently, unique educational needs. Schools must match appropriate resources, both academic and non-academic, with students who need them.

The bibliography, edited by Wendy Schwartz and Craig Howley, is copublished by the ERIC Clearinghouses on Rural Education and Small Schools and on Urban Education.

It describes publications the clearinghouses developed on effective strategies such as cooperative learning, grade promotion, and involving parents in their children's schooling; mentoring techniques; school-based programs for pregnant teens and teen parents; distance learning technologies; counseling strategies; teaching about ethnic diversity; bilingual education; and vocational education.

Source

Overcoming Risk: An Annotated Bibliography of Publications Developed by ERIC Clearinghouses is available from the ERIC Clearinghouse on Rural Education and Small Schools, P.O. Box 1348, Charleston, WV 25325, or from the ERIC Clearinghouse on Urban Education, Teachers College, Box 40, Columbia University, 525 West 120th Street, New York, NY 10027-9998 (91 pages, $10.50 prepaid).

Pacific Principals Identify Areas in Which They Need More Professional Development

Principals in the Pacific region rank providing professional development for staff, involving parents and community members in education, and giving students access to services as the top three areas in which they need professional development, according to a survey of principals conducted by the Pacific Region Educational Laboratory (PREL).

PREL provides educational research and development services to educators and policymakers in the Republic of Palau, Guam, Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Republic of the Marshall Islands, Hawaii, and American Samoa.

Responses to the survey show that, on the whole, principals think they are doing a good job in providing school leadership. Most reported that they do "fairly well to well" on the 37 categories of leadership tasks listed in the survey questionnaire.

At the same time, however, they cited a need for more information and assistance in tasks such as using community resources, assessing facility and equipment needs, using programs to reduce absenteeism, providing a code of conduct, and establishing procedures for rewarding excellent student achievement.

In response to two open-ended questions that asked principals to identify what they considered to be their greatest challenges, the principals answered controlling teacher and student absenteeism, getting community and parental involvement, having enough time to fulfill all their duties and responsibilities, limited resources, limited facilities, limited staff, improving teachers' skills and attitudes, and improving students' achievement and attitudes.

Source

Developing Excellence in School Leadership: An Assessment of Principalship in the Pacific Region is available from the Pacific Region Educational Laboratory, 1164 Bishop St., Suite 1409, Honolulu, HI 96813 (PR-890-RD, 17 pages, $3 prepaid).

Rural, Small Schools Get Tips On Picking Qualified Providers For District Staff Development

Many individuals and organizations provide staff development, and for small, rural school districts trying to decide which to use, the array can be daunting, indeed. But help in making the right decision is available in a resource guide developed by the Southwest Educational Development Laboratory.

Starting with the principle that staff development must be a tool for achieving school improvement objectives, rather than an end in itself, the guide is full of suggestions for school administrators on topics such as assessing local needs and resources, hiring qualified and effective consultants, and planning staff development sessions. For example, it reminds users that staff development providers can be found in professional organizations; federal, state, and community agencies; private consultant companies; local museums; and local businesses. Which is the most appropriate depends on the school improvement objectives of the staff development.

"One test you can use with external consultants is to ask what objectives they have in mind for your program," the guide's authors suggest. "Ideally, their response should indicate a willingness and an ability to focus on what is needed and defined by your campus and district improvement plans, rather than on what they have available."

The guide describes more than 100 organizations that can provide training and help school districts set up staff development programs. Also included is a listing of organizations and publications that provide information, both in the southwest region and nationally, and descriptions of staff development programs in exemplary rural, small schools.

Source

Guidelines for Selecting Staff Development Providers: A Resource Book for Rural Educators is available from Southwest Educational Development Laboratory, 211 East Seventh St., Austin, TX 78701 (cite order no. SD-191-RD, 118 pages, $44).

Rural Schools Try New Ideas To Promote Closer Linkages Between Students & Communities

School-based businesses, community education programs and extracurricular activities are three ways rural schools can promote stronger links with their communities, says a report from the Ford Western Taskforce of the Rural Clearinghouse for Lifelong Education and Development.

Rural schools face a key challenge — helping students prepare for the real world while hoping they stay in their communities after graduation, says the report. To accomplish these goals, some schools have developed innovative programs that encourage learning while bringing students into closer contact with local leaders.

In Belle Fourche, South Dakota, a special curriculum helps students build entrepreneurial skills, learn about the local political process and study the history of their communities. The program has won accolades from students as well as teachers. "Teachers involved in the project reported that they were more willing to change, take risks and tolerate setbacks," the study says.

In York, Nebraska, school and community leaders formed the York Resource Council, which offers before and after-school child care and enrichment programs that once were operated by the schools but dropped because of inadequate funds.

School-based companies and work/study programs also are popular with rural students, say study authors Jacqueline Spears, Larry Combs and Gwen Bailey. In Glenns Ferry, Idaho, a work/study program gives students a chance to sample local jobs before they graduate. In Las Animas, Colorado, students and community volunteers saved the annual school yearbook by converting it to an entrepreneurial activity.

Source

Accommodating Change and Diversity: Linking Rural Schools to Communities is available from the Rural Clearinghouse for Lifelong Education and Development, Division of Continuing Education, Kansas State University, College Court Building, Manhattan, KS 66506-6001 (76 pages, $12 prepaid).

Effective Rural Administrators Base School Mission and Goals Around Local Community Needs

School leadership encompasses more than just management. True school leaders understand student, parent, and community needs, and devise a mission and goals around them.

That's just one finding by a team of rural experts at the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory. The team surveyed rural administrators from high-achieving schools and compiled a hands-on resource book on rural school leadership.

Rural school administrators need to understand their communities' beliefs and attitudes before they plan policies and procedures. And they need community support. "The successful administrator needs to be a good 'fit' to the community," states one rural superintendent.

Administrators, along with concerned community members, should define the function of the school. What should the school prepare the students for? To live harmoniously with others? To grow intellectually? To master basic skills? To understand demands of the future?

The authors recommend that administrators and community members also consider skills, attitudes, and behaviors students should develop to be successful, and what the school can do to serve the interests of the community. The group should use this vision to devise a mission statement for the school.

Other areas addressed by the handbook include how to analyze problems and make decisions about them; how to resolve conflicts; how to manage time and stress; and how to recruit, induct, and retain rural teachers.

The handbook encourages rural administrators to collaborate. Comments one administrator, "Few people understand the feelings of having to deal with all they deal with except another rural administrator."

Source

Rural Administrative Leadership Handbook is available from the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, Document Reproduction Service, 101 S.W. Main Street, Suite 500, Portland, OR 97204 (cite order no. NL-590-RD, 126 pages, $10.90 prepaid).

Smart Educators Pay Attention To the Power of the Press In Building Community Relations

Educators accuse the press of highlighting bad news — such as poor test data — and making schools look bad. Journalists claim that educators won't always share information, so reporting is difficult.

Working with the press is just one of ten issues addressed in a packet of articles produced by The Regional Laboratory for Educational Improvement of the Northeast and Islands. The packet is part of a series that targets issues and concerns facing educators in rural, small school districts.

For example, articles on public relations advise educators to provide press information along with test data so that readers can "understand and interpret test data accurately."

The articles also recommend that educators regularly keep in touch with the press. Schools should issue news releases, and administrators should get to know reporters on the education beat. Candidness and honesty count with reporters, and educators should understand from the start whether the reporter accepts "off the record" comments. Not all reporters do.

Once educators establish good relations with the press, they might arrange for the local paper to carry a regular column written by school staff. The column could inform parents about classroom news and innovative instructional techniques, as well as give parents tips on how to become more active in their children's education. The column can also be used as a morale booster for both community and teachers.

Other issues addressed in the packet cover budget development strategies, community involvement, the planning process for resource allocation, potential new revenue sources, and cooperation and consolidation.

Source

Allocating Resources in Rural and Small Schools is available from The Regional Laboratory for Educational Improvement of the Northeast and Islands, 300 Brickstone Square, Suite 900, Andover, MA 01810 (cite order no. RL-9070-690-RD, 184 pages, $17.50 plus $2.50 postage and handling prepaid).

Audiographics: Easy-To-Use And Within Financial Reach Of Most Rural School Districts

For small rural schools that haven't big city school access to required courses, as well as for big city schools with small course budgets, there's audiographics, "one of today's most promising, and least costly, interactive distance learning systems," boasts a resource handbook produced by the Far West Laboratory for Educational Research and Development.

Audiographics systems combine voice transmission, computer networking, and telefax. Teachers and students talk with each other by speakerphone; use the computer keyboard to "draw" on a monitor screen, which immediately transmits the image to the other party; and send tests and other materials by fax.

Audiographics was first piloted in remote rural schools during the early 1980s. Since then it has become an increasingly popular distance learning system because of its inexpensive cost and easy-to-use hardware and software.

Most audiographic systems, says the handbook, cost at most $6,000 — and that's complete with computer and modem — to install, which is considerably less than the cost of two-way television and one-way television with audio return, two other widely used distance learning techniques.

The handbook, developed by Dean H. Bradshaw and Karen Desser, is a step-by-step guide for educators interested in developing an audiographics program. It describes the basic workings of audiographics systems and how to install them, discusses hardware and software, and offers advice and ideas for use from teachers and administrators. There is also a section on audiographics instructional strategies that teachers have found to be effective.

Source

Audiographics Distance Learning: A Resource Handbook is available from Far West Laboratory for Educational Research and Development, 730 Harrison St., San Francisco, CA 94107 (cite order no. FW-890-RD, 68 pages, $13.50 prepaid).

Catalog for Rural Educators Identifies Programs Available For Building Thinking Skills

Any rural educator who wants to teach students thinking skills should get hold of a catalog compiled and published by Research for Better Schools. The catalog identifies 248 resources on teaching thinking skills and tells educators where to find them.

All the resources in the catalog are particularly suited to rural schools. A survey by the regional educational laboratories showed building thinking skills a top priority of rural schools; all of the programs listed are relatively inexpensive to purchase and use; and teachers can put them into classrooms without having to be extensively trained.

The catalog, compiled by Janice Kruse, groups programs according to subject — language arts and reading, mathematics, science, social studies, and those that combine subjects.

Educators can expect to find a wide variety of materials listed:

- *You Decide: Creating Moral Standards* teaches sixth through twelfth grade students about decisionmaking. It illustrates, on videotape, scenes from Richard Wright's *Black Boy*, Henrik Ibsen's *A Doll House*, and Susan Glaspell's *A Jury of Her Peers*.
- *I Hate Mathematics* combines instruction with problem solving. Created for third to eighth grade students, it uses a right-brained approach to teaching mathematics.
- A software game for kindergartners through fourth graders, *Gertrude's Secret* has students solve puzzles using different colors and shapes. Students arrange puzzle pieces according to a rule that they are either given or guess themselves.

For each resource, the catalog describes the type of thinking skills the resource builds, such as problem solving or decisionmaking skills, and the form the resource takes, such as text, pamphlet or computer software.

Source

Rural Thinking Skills Catalog is available from Research for Better Schools, 444 North Third Street, Philadelphia, PA 19123 (cite order no. RS-491-RD, 170 pages, $24.95).

Clusters Provide Powerful Tool For Increasing Rural Schools' Course Offerings and Resources

In the face of declining enrollments and decreasing dollars, small rural schools have a powerful tool for improving their schools — clustering.

Schools that cluster work together for a common educational goal and pool resources such as money and teachers without giving up their autonomy.

Clustering allows schools to widen their course offerings for both students and adults; lets students participate in a wide variety of activities; and increases schools' purchasing power with a bigger pot of money.

Moreover, "if schools can demonstrate significant improvement in effectiveness, they have the basis for forming political alliances and heading off further school closings," say Paul Nachtigal and Sylvia D. Parker in a publication by the Mid-continent Regional Educational Laboratory.

Schools that cluster might share teachers for foreign language or advanced science and math courses. They might also share library materials and services.

Students from different schools can come together to form sports teams or drama productions. Teachers can work together in professional development activities and curriculum renewal.

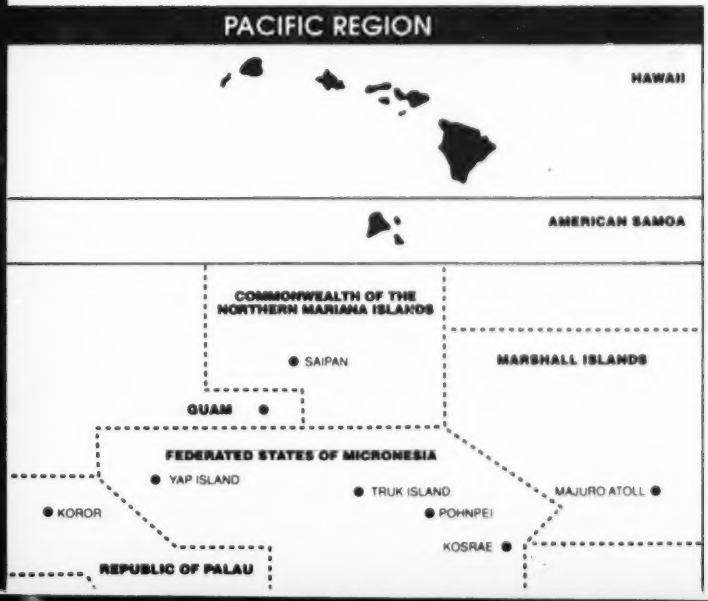
Clusters, says the report, should involve superintendents, other school leaders, school board members and the community. Since change will come slow, participants need to commit to the cluster for at least three years. Cluster members ought to meet frequently at first, but can meet less often as activities become established.

How should clusters go about change? "Forget the rules," say Nachtigal and Parker. "There is no such thing as a 'one best solution.' There is only the effective solution — one that works."

Source

Clustering: Working Together for Better Schools is available from the Mid-continent Regional Educational Laboratory, 4709 Belleview Ave., Kansas City, MO 64112 (cite order no. ML-391-RD, 18 pages, free single copies while supplies last).

LABORATORIES MAKE NEW EDUCATIONAL PRODUCTS AND PUBLICATIONS AVAILABLE TO REGIONAL AUDIENCES



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R&D SLEEPER

Not every study or report deserves to be given national exposure. But not every study that escapes the limelight deserves to remain in the shadows either.

Therefore, from time to time, this page of the ***R&D Preview*** *features some of our educational research and development "sleepers."*

Are Our Rural Students Getting a "Fair Shake?"

By Üllik Rouk

Roughly 6.6 million students attend America's 22,412 rural schools. That's about 16 percent of the nation's students and more than a quarter of its schools. Yet, we know surprisingly little about these students and schools.

Recognizing this, the Department of Education's Office of Educational Research and Improvement and the regional educational laboratories are preparing a detailed description of "the condition of education in rural, small schools" for the U.S. Congress. When completed, the report will be packed with data on rural demographics, school staffing, educational programs, federal and state policies, school finance, and student achievement.

The facts and figures are significant to all Americans. "Food, fiber, coal, gas, and lumber create wealth. Rural resources not only meet this nation's needs, they link this country to the global economy through exports," the report states. Then it goes on to explore whether, given the stake we all have in the rural sector, rural youth are getting a "fair shake."

The consequences of widespread poverty and depressed economies show up repeatedly. Deferred maintenance costs in rural schools are approaching $2.6 billion. Yet, only about half the states adjust their state aid programs to account for sparsity and economies of scale. Of 2927 rural youth in a 1980 survey, almost a third had left their rural communities by 1986 to seek jobs elsewhere.

As for student achievement, rural schools seem to be doing a reasonable job. Rural students' standardized test scores match or exceed national averages (or, more to the point, rural students do better than urban students but not as well as suburban students). On the downside, their high school graduation and college attendance rates are lower. Those who do apply to college are more likely to apply to public institutions rather than private ones.

Despite the huge quantity of information collected, the report acknowledges real problems in reporting on "rural" education. Lacking a commonly accepted definition of "rural," the databases from which its information is drawn are not always comparable.

Moreover, even the nation's top rural education experts can say little more than that rural is non-urban and that it is diverse. Rural is North Dakota, the Mississippi delta, and the coastal islands of Maine, as well as areas in "urban" states such as New York, New Jersey, and California.

So, while the report does not advocate any particular position, it makes the need for at least one policy action clear. Until all the government agencies and interest groups that work in the area of rural education find a commonly accepted definition of "rural," we won't really know whether our rural children and youth are getting a "fair shake."

For more information about *The Condition of Rural Education* contact the Office of Educational Research and Improvement, U.S. Department of Education, 555 New Jersey Ave., N.W., Washington, DC 20208-1302.

You Bet Partnerships Make a Lot of Sense For Rural Schools!

By Paul Nachtigal

Two ideas that were unthinkable a while ago are easing their way into our educational consciousness. One is that the education of our youth is too important to be left solely to educators. The other is that our nation does not have unlimited resources to commit to public education.

Educational partnerships are rapidly gaining credibility as a response to these new ways of thinking. The more common strategies that operate under this umbrella are adopt-a-school programs, public and private sector alliances that focus on particular subjects, and third-party organizations that raise funds for small grants programs, extra human resources, or linkages between schools and other organizations that serve children and youth.

These partnerships have two goals: to bring additional resources into schools and to foster community understanding about the day-to-day rigors that educators face. But do such partnerships make sense for rural schools?

I believe so — but with a caveat. Most partnerships exist in larger, metropolitan areas where businesses and corporations are big enough and flexible enough to share resources. Private sector institutions of sufficient size, with the exception of mill towns or manufacturing sites, generally do not exist in rural communities. In fact, in many rural communities, the largest enterprise in town *is* the school.

In the zeal to involve business and other private and public agencies in education, we cannot allow rural schools to be swept up in well-intentioned, but inappropriate policies predicated on the needs and conditions of urban and suburban schools. Rural schools are not like urban and suburban schools. (Neither, I might add, are all rural schools alike.) Policymakers need to recognize these differences and permit rural schools to develop their own unique brands of partnerships.

At the risk of oversimplification, allow me to use rural and urban school reform strategies for community involvement as an example. In urban schools, efforts are under way to make the community part of the school. Just the reverse is true in rural school reform. Here, a frequent reform objective is to extend the school out into the community. These are two different policy strategies for accomplishing much the same goal — strengthening the link between the school and the community.

Continuing with our rural schools example, let's assume that the purpose of partnerships is to expand the learning environment and to open up the community so that the community itself becomes the subject in the study of history, science, or economics. And assume for a minute that in a true partnership, benefits flow more than one way.

Rural schools have a great deal to gain from true partnerships with their communities. Making the community the focus of study greatly expands learning opportunities for students. But if properly orchestrated, school resources can make significant contributions to community development as well.

Involving students in land use studies, economic surveys, or water sampling studies provides rich learning opportunities and valuable information for community decision making. Similarly, excess school space, brought about by declining enrollments in many rural districts, can be made available for senior housing or meal programs, offices for human service delivery, community recreation, and contracting space for private business.

There are also benefits in forming partnerships with neighboring schools and institutions of higher education. When small school districts band together, they can share programs. School libraries can stretch their limited resources by networking with each other. Curriculum and staff development can become more efficient.

And as for higher education, these institutions need to collaborate with public schools to insure the relevance of their educational programs, the preparation of future educators, and the conduct of site-based research activities. Institutions of higher education, of course, have an array of human resources for rural schools, including assistance with curriculum design and staff development.

But such partnerships must be intentionally created and carefully nurtured. Rural institutions of all kinds are so tightly strapped for funds that there is no wiggle room for initiating programs that don't attack rural problems head on. Policymakers at all levels must be certain that the impact of their educational policies is the right impact for rural schools.

Paul Nachtigal is director of the Rural Institute at the Mid-continent Regional Educational Laboratory in Aurora, Colorado.